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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [MOPS](#) [CAN](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: SUBJECT: SPIN BOLDAK: A STABILITY AND SECURITY
BALANCING ACT

REF: KABUL4024

Classified By: Interagency Provincial Affairs Deputy Director Hoyt Yee
for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Spin Boldak District in Kandahar enjoys a reputation for stability and security in a region of the country otherwise known for insurgent violence. Encompassing the Weesh border crossing with Pakistan and astride strategic Highway 4, Spin Boldak occupies valuable turf on the front line in the counterinsurgency. In the East, the district is second only to Torkham in the importance of its transit trade and its potential to generate customs revenues for the state.

Given its location, Spin Boldak also serves as the main southern supply route for ISAF, insurgent travel and narcotics trafficking. The licit and illicit opportunities of this frontier setting provide an incentive to all actors dependent on the district's stability to maintain safe passage throughout. End Summary.

Gateway to Quetta

¶2. (SBU) Sitting along an historic trade route to the Indian subcontinent and the Pakistani seaport of Karachi, Spin Boldak is a hub of licit and illicit commercial activity. A link in the coalition supply chain, Spin Boldak's stability, including access to the border and freedom of movement on Highway 4, has become a top ISAF priority in advance of the announced troop surge. The same holds true for the Taliban, whose leadership across the border in Quetta is similarly dependent on transit through the district for the resupply of its forces. Through a confluence of mutual interests, ISAF convoys from Karachi and Taliban convoys from Quetta and neighboring sanctuaries, alike, currently enjoy unimpeded access across the border and along Spin Boldak's roadways and transit routes.

Securing Local Highways and Byways

¶3. (SBU) Securing Highway 4 and its environs has been the task of the 8th Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment (8-1), 5th Stryker Brigade, which took control of the area from Canadian forces in June 2009. Initially comprised of three troops (companies), 8-1 has aggressively assumed responsibility for Spin Boldak and outlying districts. Since 8-1 entered the area, the number of attacks on ISAF in the district have been comparatively few (for the south) and limited to IEDs. While IEDs are a continuing threat) the risk and sophistication seeming to increase in parallel with the expansion of ISAF patrolling) there have been no coalition fatalities since the transfer of command in June.

¶4. (C) The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) counterpart to 8-1 is the 4th Directorate of the Afghan Border Police

(ABP) under the command of Colonel Abdul Razziq. With approximately 3,400 men under arms and de facto control of the local Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan Highway Police (AHP) contingents, Razziq is the district's main power broker. To date, his force has borne the brunt of Spin Boldak's insurgent violence. A recent incident was the killing of a commander and four of his men in Luy Karez an hour north of Spin Boldak center on November 22; responsibility was claimed by the Taliban. Despite strong anti-Taliban credentials, Colonel Razziq poses his own set of challenges with influence and interests reportedly extending into the district's main economic activity: trafficking.

Ink Spotting

¶5. (SBU) Sitting along the district's key northern supply line, the village of Luy Karez, base of the slain APB commander, had been targeted by 8-1 for application of "ink spot" counter- insurgency -- the extension of governance, security and development to key districts. At a November 11 shura in Luy Karez, local elders voiced concerns to the DST Spin Boldak CIV-MIL team about the proposed initiative. The concerns, not uncommon throughout the district included: 1) that an increased government presence (including ANSF-ISAF) would find citizens caught in any resulting crossfire, if not directly targeted by insurgents for enabling government and ISAF activities; and 2) that ISAF was not committed to the long haul, thus eventually and inevitably leaving villages to face Taliban vengeance alone. In similar settings throughout the district, elders have raised an additional concern that ANSF itself was part of the problem. For 8-1, Luy Karez was

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to be just the starting off point for COIN activities.

Challenging the Status Quo

¶6. (SBU) At the November 11 Shura, the ABP commander who was subsequently assassinated cast a surprising figure, pressing his fellow Noorzai tribesmen, in the presence of outsiders, to reject insurgent and criminal activity in their village and to cooperate with the government in bringing security and development. Challenging the local narrative of outside intimidation, he demanded of the elders, "the Taliban may have shut your school down but who took out the window frames?" The implication of local complicity was clear. Ten days later, the commander was gunned down. Serving to further highlight the need for increased security in the area and the validity of the elders' concerns, an IED disabled one Stryker on the CIV-MIL team's return journey from the shura.

Changing Priorities

¶7. (C) With 8-1's loss in November of one troop of soldiers to Arghandab, the ability to ink spot the district and extend governance and development to at risk communities throughout Spin Boldak has already been shelved. In Luy Karez itself, where expectations of improved governance and services have actually been raised, providing the persistent security presence required is no long feasible. A new ISAF mission directive will now limit 8-1's area of operations to Highway 4 and the Weesh border crossing; an important mission in light of the surge but along a route that sees only a portion of all trade transiting through the district - much of the illicit trade traveling on ratlines such as the one traversing Luy Karez.

Comment

¶8. (SBU) The killing of the Luy Karez ABP commander reflects certain realities underpinning Spin Boldak's perceived stability and the local consensus behind it -- limited

security, governance and development beyond the district center and areas immediately adjoining Highway 4. This intentional state of affairs victimizes citizens and damages GIROA legitimacy but ensures freedom of movement for insurgents and narcotics traffickers as well as revenue making opportunities for local power brokers. Ironically, it also guarantees a level of coalition security, as upsetting the status quo would threaten the insurgent supply chain. How to confront this set of challenges without risking the district's much valued stability is the main question that civil and military partners are grappling with. Partnered with weak local government institutions, compromised ANSF leadership and now a reduced ISAF force and mission, CIV-MIL COIN efforts in Spin Boldak are at a crossroads. PRT will continue to monitor developments in Spin Boldak and engage local officials on how to strengthen security in this and other key border areas.

19. (U) This message was drafted at the DST in Spin Boldak.
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